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Director of Central Intelligence

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CIA CPAS NIDC 82-146C

National Intelligence Daily (Cable)

23 June 1982

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CPAS NIDC 82-146C
23 June 1982
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Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

3.5(c)
Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

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3.5(c)

Contents

Argentina: *New President* 4

NR

Top Secret

3.5(c)

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

NR

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

NR

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

ARGENTINA: New President

//The naming of retired General Reynaldo Bignone as President was probably accomplished by the Army over the objections of the commanders of the Navy and Air Force. 3.5(c)

//The Army, in a communique issued yesterday, claims the armed forces are united behind the decision. Other reports indicate, however, that the Navy and the Air Force have withdrawn from the day-to-day running of the country in protest over Army Commander in Chief Nicolaides's imposition of his candidate, but that they intend to remain in the junta. Army generals who were largely responsible for former President Galtieri's ouster also are opposing Bignone. 3.5(c)

//Before Bignone retired in December at 53, he served as Commander of the Military Institutes for one year, and he held the politically sensitive post of Secretary General of the Army from 1977 to 1980. The new President has good relations with political leaders and the press and favors continued military involvement in the government. He reportedly agrees with the monetarist policies of the last two governments. 3.5(c)

Comment: //Senior Army officers have been arguing since Galtieri's ouster that one of their own should complete the political reform begun by the Army in 1976. Army leaders probably believe that by retaining the presidency, the Army will be less vulnerable to recriminations--and possible purges--as reaction to the loss of the Falklands spreads. 3.5(c)

The withdrawal by the Navy and the Air Force preserves the trappings of the junta, enabling the Army to attempt to overcome the paralysis afflicting the government and to set new economic and political policies. Any such gains may be short lived, however, because criticism of Nicolaides's move by the other services will leave the regime little room to carry out the new policies. 3.5(c)

Civilians may withhold support because of the selection process and because of Bignone's identification with monetarist economic policy. They probably would work with discontented members of all three services. Second-echelon grumbling in the Army also could prompt additional shakeups. 3.5(c)

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

NR

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

NR

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

NR

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

NR

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

NR

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

NR

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424

NR

Page Denied

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628424